

**Statement of Thomas L. Stevens
Director of Visitor Services, United States Capitol**

Before the Committee on House Administration

**Regarding
The Capitol Visitor Center: the Visitor Experience**

October 17, 2007

Chairman Brady and Congressman Ehlers, Members of the Committee. I am honored to appear before you today to discuss the visitor experience as we transition into the new Capitol Visitor Center. Before I begin, I want to thank the members of this Committee for their continued support of the men and women of the Capitol Guide Service & Congressional Special Services Office. You have helped insure that the Capitol remain an open and inviting educational experience for millions of visitors from around the world.

Visitors first came to the Capitol in large numbers during the Centennial celebrations in 1876. In an effort to ensure that visitors were treated with dignity and provided accurate information the idea emerged of having official guides. The first organized Guide Service was created to deal with this under the jurisdiction of the two Sergeants at Arms.

Following the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970, Congress brought the Capitol Guide Service under the jurisdiction of the new Capitol Guide Board comprised of both the House and Senate Sergeant at Arms and the Architect of the Capitol. The Capitol Guide Board began in 1995 a review of visitor services at the Capitol. As a result of that review, in 1996 the Guide Service was merged with the Congressional Special Services Office, which had been created in 1983 to assist visitors with special needs. Today we facilitate access to the Capitol for more than a million visitors each year.

The challenges since the events of September 11, 2001 have been many. The responsibilities of the Capitol Guide Service have broadened greatly and are tightly married to the security and safety demands placed upon the Capitol Police. As a result of these additional responsibilities, the number of visitors that we are able to personally escort through the Capitol has diminished. This has resulted in many visitors calling upon their Members of Congress to gain access to the Capitol. The new Capitol Visitor Center and additional staffing will once again enable us to provide each and every visitor with a professionally trained guide.

The much anticipated opening of the Capitol Visitor Center will enable us to provide the state of the art experience deserving of those visiting this great institution. It has always been our mission to provide an inviting, educational and inspiring experience for the visitor and the Capitol Visitor Center is the cornerstone to taking that goal to the highest level. Not only will it provide many much needed amenities for the visitors but it will also provide an educational experience second to none.

In closing, I want to work closely with this committee, the Architect of the Capitol, Ms. Terrie Rouse and her team to create the best possible visitor experience for your constituents.

That concludes my testimony Mr. Chairman and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.